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ABSTRACT

This paper presents strategies that address the needs of the school district assessment office for standardized procedures to support reliable and efficient test processing and reporting and that meet the needs of school staff for test administration guidelines. The key to test administration and processing quality is a knowledgeable test coordinator at each site. The Building Test Coordinator (BTC) may be a teacher or administrator, but should not be the school's principal. It is essential for district testing personnel to meet with all BTCs before the test, and to acknowledge their performances after the test through some appropriate reward or acknowledgment. Personal delivery and check-in of all testing materials will help ensure success. Communication, at all points in the process, is the key to effective test administration and processing. Total quality techniques in testing depend on procedures that involve the user throughout the entire process. Assessment offices need to design goals, processes, and procedures with the user in mind. (SLD)

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1996 NCME Annual Meeting
Session H3: Current Issues in Test Administration

Successful Efforts to Improve Test Administration Practices

A^3

Avoiding Assessment Anarchy

Quality Test Administration Strategies:

Communicate Expectations
Reduce Variation
Increase Quality
Improve Relationships
Reward Excellence
Recognize Success

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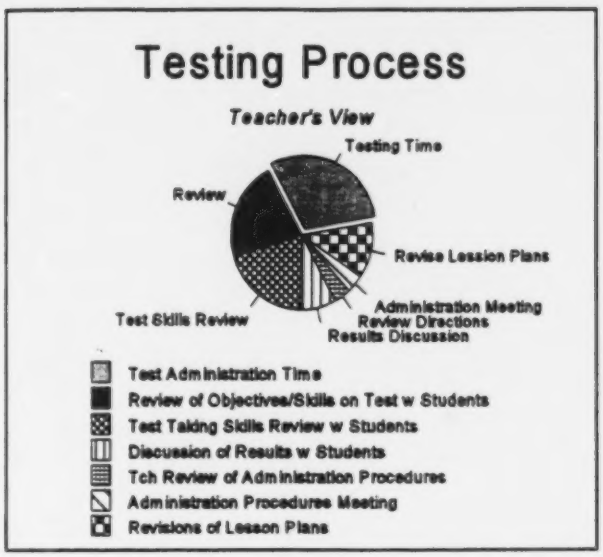
The ultimate purpose of educational assessment is to produce data that informs instructional practice and curriculum. Development time and adequate funding (resources and staff) are needed to produce high quality assessments which accomplish that goal. The assessment process is more than administration time, scoring, and reporting, however. Teachers and principals view the actual administration time as only a small part of the impact of the testing process on instruction and the school day [see Figure 1]. Assessment office staff need to consider the testing process from both the point of view of the teacher/principal and the assessment staff. Developing an assessment system that provides meaningful information with instructional application requires planning and consideration of factors relevant to both of these groups. We should strive to meet the needs of all of these internal and external customers of assessment information.



In the Cherry Creek Schools we have found that we can increase teacher, principal, and support staff buy-in and cooperation through clear communication of expectations and consequences, rewarding and recognizing quality. The following strategies address the needs of the assessment office for standardized procedures that support reliable and efficient test processing and reporting. In addition, they address the administration process as viewed by school staff.

Designate a Building Test Coordinator (BTC) Team at Each School

The key to both administration and processing quality is a knowledgeable person at each school.

Materials issues: Best handled by clerical staff, teacher assistant, or counselor--someone with a more flexible schedule which makes it easier to contact and maintain ongoing communications with assessment office. [Example: writing assessment materials inventory/distribution/collection.]

Administration/scoring issues: This "cheerleading" role can be played well by either an administrator or a teacher, as long as they are knowledgeable on technical and instructional issues of the assessment. [Example: Writing assessment scoring issues, questions on rubric.]

Use "BEST PRACTICES": Regularly share what works in your school or district, such as providing extra clerical time before and after the testing dates.

Dissuade Principal as BTC: The principal must support the assessment, and it is critical that he/she be informed and involved in the assessment, especially regarding deadlines, requirements, etc. Their best role is to support their BTC through providing extra time and resources (e.g., clerical help).

Meet with ALL Building Test Coordinators

No one reads directions. Do not expect anyone to read instructions and checklists. Require the BTC to attend a brief overview meeting, with flexibility in meeting times in terms of time of day and day of week. Do not send test materials through the mail.

Provide all test materials at the meeting (except test booklets). Walk through the expectations (coordinator and teacher checklists, materials list, materials check-out sheet, administration directions).

Require the BTC to personally deliver their answer sheets after the testing (or arrange area "drop-off" locations around your district). Stress the consequences of poor quality, particularly the longer turnaround time for results for their school. Provide examples of what "good materials" look like (answer sheets completed correctly, header sheets completed, etc.). Communicate how long "fixing" takes at the district level, but how little time is required at an individual teacher/school level to provide quality work [Example: 3 minutes per teacher vs. 40 hours for assessment staff].

Reward High Quality Materials Return

Everyone Likes Rewards / Praise, and Knowledge of a Job Well Done!!:

Find out what is rewarding to your BTC's and do that!! Examples of inexpensive tokens of appreciation include:

-Gift certificates ($5) from a book store
-Certificates of appreciation
-Letters of thanks to supervisors
-Thank You party
-Feedback on materials returned

Require Personal Delivery of Materials to Testing Office and Check In

Schedule a time for check in, and develop the process to inspect their materials. Communicate that the BTC or someone at their school will be responsible for bringing their materials up to the acceptable standard. Unacceptable materials will either be returned to the school, or schools will be charged for processing time (obviously, this must be negotiated before the testing). Whenever possible provide options (e.g., testing office hiring part-time staff to go to schools and prepare the materials, with school's paying for this service). Use area check-in locations throughout your district, as needed.

Communicate--Communicate--Communicate

One area in which most school districts can improve is that of communication. Often we communicate to teachers and parents only immediately prior to the testing date(s), and then several months later when parents receive the results. Parents and teachers rarely learn how results are used to improve curriculum, instruction, or individual student learning plans. Assessment offices should have a year-long communication plan for school staffs, parents, and the community. We cannot say too often, to both teachers and parents, "What tests we are giving, Why we are giving them, What past results show, and How we use results to improve student performance."

The information must be tailored to the needs of the audience. Often we provide teachers and principals test administration checklists, manuals, and reports that address the assessment office needs for standardization and efficiency. Rarely do we provide teachers and principals with information that meets their needs as a customer of the test: how will the test impact their students, or the curriculum, or the district? Briefly communicating the entire assessment process--including both administration and use of results issues--reinforces the teamwork that is needed to ensure a useful and used assessment system.

Design Processing to Reward Quality (or at least not punish it)

Test processing procedures can either punish or reward teachers and test coordinators that read and follow instructions. In an effort to minimize the number of batches to process, assessment offices may punish efficient, high quality work from one school by delaying their reports/results caused by problems from other schools or teachers. Our procedures now include several "waves" of processing and reporting, with deadline dates determined by the time needed to properly collect and prepare materials for delivery to the testing office. Test coordinators know the deadlines and understand the relationship between the date they receive results and the date and quality of how their materials were submitted for processing.

Use "Quality" Techniques

Total Quality is simply behaving and treating others like you would like to be treated. Assessment offices, if flavored with high stakes accountability, will be viewed by teachers and principals as "the enemy". To counteract these perceptions, assessment processes must encompass techniques that involve the "user/customer" throughout the entire process, not just as the end.

Assessment offices need to design their goals, processes, and procedures with the following in mind.

Information: Must be timely, meeting the user's needs and expectations; understandable.

Responsive: Assessment staff must be accessible, and understand the culture of the school (all levels) and the demands placed on teacher, principals, and other staff.

Input: Ask for feedback whenever possible, particularly when the user can comment on the quality of the material or information. Then act on the feedback, making improvements to your processes, procedures, reports.

Teamwork: Teachers and principals know that test data can be used to"get ya." Assessments and testing offices must be seen as "a part of," not "apart from" schools and teachers. Communicate the proper role district assessments should play in the overall picture of student performance improvement. Communicate to teachers, principals, and parents what tests are administered, when, why, and how the results are used to improve curriculum, instructional practice, and individual student performance. Communicate the idea that we are a "system," that the quality of student performance from one school affects the resources, programs, etc. of all other schools in the district (and ultimately, the state and nation).

Rapid turnaround: Reward schools by providing rapid processing and reporting of results. Never is almost identical to late with assessment results.

Understandable reports: In reporting, the three most important words are-- "audience, audience, audience." Customizing reports for the audience requires additional time and resources, but the payoff is *actual use* of the results!

Useful and useable information: Assessment office staff need to undertake marketing strategies: Find out what information various users value, what are their needs for information. Create staff development and training opportunities on classroom assessment for teachers and administrators, and for school staff and parents around use of assessment results.

High Standards for All: The high quality standard must be applied to assessment office processes and procedures, also. "What's good for the goose is good for the gander." If individuals receive materials from the assessment office that are not correct or complete (e.g., answer sheets are missing for some students), assessment staff must take prompt action to rectify the situation. We must demonstrate that our standards apply to our actions as well as others'.

Continual Improvement in Processes

As the saying goes, "good things take time." Efforts to improve administration, processing, and reporting take several years. Plan for incremental steps to change behavior, rewarding and reinforcing quality results. Keep a log of problems, and plan to reduce the variation the next time you do that process. Communicate with the assessment staff, central office and building administrators, and as much as possible with your test coordinators and teachers. Let everyone know how improvements in the entire assessment process will provide them with better and more information, at lower cost to the taxpayer.

Be positive, but expect new problems to occur even as you reduce ones through your plans. Involve the entire assessment staff in the planning process, as well as key representatives from your various internal and external audiences.

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About the Author

M. Kevin Matter is Coordinator of Assessment and Evaluation for the Cherry Creek Schools, a suburban Denver school district of over 35,000 students. Dr. Matter has directed systemwide assessment programs for over 16 years in districts in Texas and Colorado. Recent interests have focused on application of Total Quality tools and techniques in school systems and assessment offices, and using test results to corroborate teacher judgment of student performance in standards-based education.

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